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❁ THE INDIAN PASS ❁



A LEGEND

✓ Hovenberg

The * Indian * Pass

AN ADIRONDACK LEGEND

BY

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AN ADIRONDACK LEGEND.

*My guide was old ;
Rude toil had left its trace,
In many a line and fold
Upon his face.*

*In camp one night
We lay ; 'twas dark and still ;
Our camp-fire cast its light
On tree and hill.*

*His pipe he lit,
And as the smoke curled out,
With homely, rustic wit
Discoursed about*

*The relics few
Of Indians here : strange things within
His own experience ; true ?
They may have been.*

*Among the rest
Was one that thrills me yet ;
I pencil-caught it, lest
I should forget.*

*The story his,
And mine alone the rhyme ;
Mine, too, the faultiness
Of step and time.*

*With eyes fixed on the fire as in a glass,
He told this wondrous story of*

THE INDIAN PASS.*

'Twas ten years ago, come next autumn, I think,
That I paused in my tramp through the forest, to drink.
A spring bubbled up in a cool, shady spot.
I threw myself down : I was weary and hot.
While resting and carelessly glancing around.
I spied a torn paper that lay on the ground.
The rain and the winter had wrought their own will,
But traces of writing I saw on it still.
I studied it closely, and rather in doubt,
But after a season I puzzled it out.
The writing was quaint, and in characters old,
And strange and amazing the story it told.
'Twas written in rhyme, very crude, it is true,
But just as it ran I'll repeat it to you.

“Memorandum. To remember
“If moonlight is bright
“On the eighth of September.
“At twelve in the night,

* The Indian Pass is a cañon in the Adirondack Mountains, the precipitous sides of which are nearly 2,000 feet in height.

“To climb Summit Rock, in the Indian Pass,
 “And where the cliffs rise, in a towering mass,
 “To look toward the West ; where steepest the wall
 “Rises, a hemlock hangs, poised in its fall.
 “Straight on a line with its trunk, to the South.
 “A thousand feet up, yawns a cavernous mouth.
 “With care you may climb to it : treasures of gold
 “Were massed in its depths, by the Indians of old.
 “And the spirit of one, whom they slew on the spot,
 “Tarries to guard it from thieves and from rot.
 “Encounter him boldly ; of shadow of fear
 “Beware, or the hour of thy death draweth near
 “By the sun’s brighter ray is this cavern concealed.
 “In the deep shadow cast by the moon is revealed.
 “On this one alone, of the nights of the year,
 “The cave may be reached by a head that is clear.
 “Gain the cave, brave the spectre, and rifle the mine—
 “Take it—the Indian’s treasure is thine.”

This was the story that greeted my eyes ;
 I read it with feelings of doubt and surprise.
 What ! could it be true that a treasure lay hid,
 The rocks and the caves of that cañon amid ?
 I had been there quite often ; I well knew the place.
 The precipitous cliff at the east of Wallace,
 Where McIntyre rises, grim, solemn and bare,
 Its triple tops piercing the crystalline air.
 But was it not nonsense to give it a thought—
 To dream that old Wallace with treasure was fraught ?

And still, an old legend, forgotten long since,
 Told of the wealth of an Indian prince,
 Who, caught by white rascals, and burned at the stake,
 Thinking to force him disclosure to make,
 Of where in the woods he had buried his gold,
 While fiercely around him the flames hotly rolled—
 Was offered his life if he'd show them his cachés,
 Mocked at his foes as he laughed in their faces.

A year or so after, on some errand bent.
 Down to the old ruined village* I went.
 The houses were mouldy, and terribly damp,
 So north of the village I built me a camp
 Of pine and spruce boughs, in a well-woven mass,
 About half way up to the Indian Pass.
 My fire-wood was cut ; I was fixed for the night :
 My camp-fire was blazing up brilliant and bright—
 I suddenly thought that *that* night was the time,
 For the search for the treasure, as told in the rhyme.
 'Twas the eighth of September, there was no mistake—
 But had I the courage the trial to make ?
 I filled up my pipe and prepared for a smoke ;
 That climb up the mountain was clearly no joke.
 And then to say nothing of having to brave
 A bloodthirsty Indian ghost in the cave.
 “No, no, the old spectre his vigils may keep,
 And I'll dream of the gold as I peacefully sleep.”
 Just then the new moon, gleaming bright in the skies,
 Shot beam after beam in my cowardly eyes.

* The Adirondack Iron Works, abandoned in 1845.

I said to myself, "I will visit the spot,
 But climb up that horrible wall I will not."
 I threaded the trail by the moon's yellow light,
 And stood on the Rock in the Pass at midnight.
 Yes, there was the hemlock, and off to the left,
 Faintly outlined, was a shadowy cleft.
 Ah, there was the cave, and I felt my heart thrill
 At the thought of the treasure—but was it there still?
 Leading up to this cleft, I thought I could trace
 A sort of a path up the steep rocky face—
 A series of footholds, by which one might climb
 The cliff to the cavern, with patience and time.
 If the Indians had climbed it, why surely I could—
 'Twas enough—I jumped down from the rock where I stood.
 In a very few minutes I stood at the base,
 And prepared for my climb up the side of Wallface.
 In order to gain the best hold on the rocks,
 I drew off my boots and my thick woolen socks.
 I capped my revolver and tightened my belt,
 And ready for any adventure I felt.

I had marked out the place to begin the ascent
 Where help by the bushes and trees would be lent.
 At first I climbed up with comparative ease,
 And soon looked out over the tops of the trees.
 The evening was beautiful—calm and serene,
 Not a cloud in the bright azure dome could be seen.
 Upward—still upward; advantage I took
 Of every crevice and angular nook.
 I crawl'd, climb'd and squirm'd around the rough rocks;

Sometimes I lovingly hugged the huge blocks.
 Once I grew dizzy—what if I should fall ?
 I cowered up close to the pitiless wall.
 I said to myself, “ This never will do,
 Just think of the treasure.”—and reckless I grew.
 Still climbing upward—ah, how would it end ?
 ’Twas hard to climb up—but—’twas *death* to descend.
 I stopped in my way, for before me a rut,
 Deep in the cliff by some rockslide was cut ;
 Across it, and firm in the rock was a ledge,
 A little spruce sapling hung over its edge.
 I looked all around—other way there was none :
 I must leap it, the terrible risk must be run.
 Below sank the cliff’s perpendicular wall,
 Polished and smooth as an ivory ball.
 I gathered myself, and gave a wild spring,
 But the rock that I leapt from, a treacherous thing,
 Gave way as I jumped. and downward it dashed,
 Awakening the echoes below as it crashed—
 Whilst I missed the ledge—grasped the shrub as I fell,
 And hung by my hands—’twas an instant of Hell —
 Then pulled myself upward—it took all my strength,
 And knelt on the shelf as I reached it at length.
 I climbed after that as one would in a dream,
 Where all things uncertain and shadowy seem.
 At last, looking upward, I saw the dark cave,
 And looked in the gloom for the Indian brave.
 More of the ghost than the treasure I thought,
 As I lighted a roll of birch-bark I had brought.

I looked at myself—I was surely a sight
 To make an old Indian quake with affright.
 My blue flannel shirt into tatters was torn,
 My trousers of buckskin were dirty and worn ;
 I was covered with dust ; a scratch on my face
 Added fresh charms to its natural grace.
 “I’ll bet him a dollar that I look the worst—
 The chances are even that he will run first.”
 These are my thoughts as the cave I explore—
 What is this piled on the rough rocky floor ?
 . Armlets and coins of some metal—’tis gold !
 Heaped up before me are riches untold !
 “Here is the wealth of the Indian chief !
 Here is there treasure beyond all belief.
 All of this booty is mine—mine alone”—
 A sound o’er my head nearly turned me to stone !
 I lifted my torch, and I saw by its light
 A Something that curdled my blood with affright.
 A form strong and stalwart—a face dark and stern—
 Eyes that like coals seemed to sparkle and burn—
 My torch failed me then—still the form I could trace—
 I drew my revolver, and fired in its face !

Before the first echo came back from the cave,
 I felt myself seized by the Indian brave,
 Borne to the brink in his ironlike clasp—
 Weak as a child in that powerful grasp,
 Poised in the air for an instant, and then
 Hurlled like a stone from the mouth of the den.

Down, down—I shot down—ah, what—could it be—
 I had lodged in the top of the old hemlock tree ;
 But the strain was too great—I could feel the tree sway,
 Then downward it swept as the roots broke away.

The next I remember, I lay on the ground.
 Far up above me the precipice frowned—
 Bright on the rocks shone the clear light of day—
 Twenty feet off the old hemlock tree lay.
 Then was it a dream ? No, for fast in my hold,
 Still did I clutch one rude circlet of gold !

I lay for some moments, and then I arose ;
 I was dreadfully bruised, from my head to my toes :
 My left arm was crushed, nor indeed was that all,
 For I suffered for years from that terrible fall.
 Did I try it again ? Ah, no, sir, indeed,
 Once was enough for my uttermost greed.
 But there still is the treasure, and there it will stay,
 Until on the world breaks the great Judgment day.
 For the hemlock is gone, and without it no trace
 Can be found of the mouth of that horrible place.

Camp Comfort, December 25th, 1878.

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